DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 710 CE 033 876

AUTHOR Meredith, Vick; Williams, M. Lee
TITLE An Analysis of Secretarial Training Needs.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Texas Speech Communication Association Convention (Houston, TX, October 7-9, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Demography; *Educational Attitudes; *Educational Needs; Employee Attitudes; Postsecondary Education; *Secretaries; Shorthand; Typewriting

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine what secretaries perceive their training needs to be, and to determine how those training needs might be related to various demographic variables of the individual secretary. A questionnaire was developed that included the majority of skills that could be taught in a training session for secretaries. Thirty-six university and private industry secretaries ranked the items as being of "no benefit" to "highly beneficial" on a scale of 1 to 4 and also included their experience, tenure, job training, education, age, and job types. It was found that only a few secretaries believed that training in typing or shorthand would be beneficial, probably because these skills are prerequisites for being hired. Training on a word processor was viewed by most as a highly important training need, followed in rankings by interpersonal communication, grammar, and business correspondence. It was also found that secretaries did not want to interrupt their personal time to attend training programs. Several relationships between demographic variables and perceived training needs were found to be negatively correlated. For example, the more education secretaries had, the less they saw a need for training in most of the basic components. Length of experience was found to be negatively correlated with perceived training needs for dictaphone machine or copying equipment. It was recommended that a larger and more diverse sample of secretaries be used in further studies of secretaries' training needs. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED221710

AN ANALYSIS OF

SECRETARIAL TRAINING NEEDS

Vick Meredith and M. Lee Williams
Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts
Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, Texas 78666

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

V Meredith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented at the Texas Speech Communication Association Convention, Houston, Texas, October, 1982.

CE 033876

AN ANALYSIS OF

SECRETARIAL TRAINING NEEDS*

Introduction

Several recent articles have indicated a trend toward secretarial shortages in both the public and private sectors (Balsley, 1979; Seixas, 1980). In addition, of the women who are entering the field as new secretaries, the great majority of them lack certain basic secretarial skills (Seixas, 1980). The reason for a lack of manpower to fill secretarial positions seems to be that women are finding that they can excel in many other job areas that were once considered "for men only." Many of these alternative jobs require significantly less training and pay much higher salaries (Seixas, 1980).

As women continue to diversify in their occupational objectives, the trend of lesser trained secretaries entering the job market can only increase (Balsley, 1979). Even high school and college curriculums seem to be moving away from the traditional courses offered "secretarial types" such as shorthand and filing procedures.

Organizations are beginning to feel the need to train secretaries prior to giving them full job responsibilities. Not only does the new recruit need training, but so do many of the older experienced secretaries. With the ongoing advancement of technology in office equipment that is presently taking place, many organizations are finding they must train old experienced secretaries in order to maximize the efficiency of expensive new equipment.

The Occupational Outlook Handbook, printed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, describes secretaries as workers who:

---

*The authors would like to thank Robert Kosub, Dwayne Barber, and John Ross for the work and insight they contributed to this project.

> relieve their employers of routine duties so that they can work on more important matters. Although most secretaries type, take shorthand, and deal with callers, the time spent on these duties varies in different types of organizations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1978).

In essence, what the experts are saying is that the title "Secretary" is a catch-all phrase that may refer to persons employed as file clerks to persons working as administrative assistants. Because of this diversity, it is difficult to get very specific about the training needs of secretaries as a whole.

Although there is an abundance of literature on training needs assessment, there is little that deals directly with secretarial needs (Hackey, 1980; Hilliard, 1977). In fact, there is a scarcity of empirical data available that gives insight into the secretarial situation. Most articles include broad generalizations made only from personal observation or speculation.

It was the purpose of this study to provide a more systematic understanding of secretaries and the types of training that they believe to be important. Specifically, this study attempted to: 1) determine what secretaries in general perceive their training needs to be; and 2) determine how those training needs might be related to various demographic variables of the individual secretary.

Methods

After reviewing the literature of several secretarial training assessment programs (Mehallis & Fair, 1979; Rudnitzky, 1980) and discussing with a number of secretaries their job duties, a questionnaire was developed which included the majority of skills that could be taught in a training session for secretaries. The skills were: typing, grammar, shorthand/dictation, filing procedures/record keeping, business correspondence, interpersonal communication, in-house communication, telephone communication, receiving and screening visitors, and equipment skills including the word processor, copy-

ing equipment, dictaphone, and telephone. Secretaries rated their need for training on each of these items. Response alternatives were: "Would be of no benefit," 2) "Would be slightly beneficial," 3) "Would be moderately beneficial," or 4) "Would be highly beneficial." Secretaries were also asked to rank-order the three skills they would most benefit from if offered in a training session. (See Appendix for questionnaire)

The form also asked for background information of the person completing the survey. The secretary's experience, tenure, specific type of job training, education, time lapse since the last training session, age, and job type were sought. Finally, secretaries were asked when they would be most willing to attend training sessions.

The subjects were 36 university and private industry secretaries. Twenty-eight of the secretaries were employed by Southwest Texas State University and the remaining subjects were employed by private industry in and around the San Marcos area. The subjects were visited at their job by a researcher who administered the survey on an individual basis. Instructions for completing the form were on the survey and subjects were invited to look over the form and ask any questions they might have. Depending on the subject's preference, the researcher waited for the questionnaire to be completed or returned the next day to pick up the form.

Results

The surveys were coded and entered into a computer program for statistical testing. A frequency distribution was provided so as to better understand the demographics and top perceived training needs. Secondly, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed to determine any relationships between training needs and demographic variables.

Demographics

Table 1 displays the results of the subjects' demographic characteristics. The majority of respondents indicated that they had been employed in a secretarial position for more than two years (69.5%), with 38% having more than eleven years experience. Slightly over 65% reported having been at their same job for over two years. Almost 70% said their primary source of job training had been on-the-job. All were high school graduates with most (61%) having some college background. Half (50%) of those surveyed had not attended a training session in over two years. The ages were varied, with the highest number (30.6%) being 25-31. More than 55% of the secretaries classified their job as predominately "typing/filing/record keeping."

Perceived Training Needs

The frequency results for perceived training needs are shown in Table 2. Fifty percent believed they would receive no benefit from typing training. Over 36% felt that training in grammar would be of no benefit while another 36% felt it would be of a slight benefit. Over 40% responded that shorthand/dictation would be of no benefit to them. Filing procedures/record keeping training was viewed by 33.3% as being moderately helpful. Less than 20% believed that training in business correspondence would not be helpful. Over 36% believed that interpersonal communication would be highly beneficial training, with another 25% feeling it would be moderately helpful. Training on the word processor was viewed by 63.4% as being highly needed.

Table 3 presents the results of the training needs ranked first by the subjects. Twenty-five percent ranked training on the word processor as their most important training need. Another 16.7% reported that interpersonal communication training would be the most advantageous. Grammar was ranked by 13.9% as the most beneficial training that they could undergo.

Table 4 displays the combined results for the subjects three top ranked needs. Training on the word processor most often occurred as one of the top three needs (21.2%). Training in both interpersonal communication and grammar emerged as top ranked needs, with 13% responses for each. Business correspondence was seen by 12% as being one of the three most important training needs.

Other frequency results, as shown in Table 5, indicated that subjects were unwilling to attend training sessions after work (63.9%), on Saturdays (69.4%), or on a weekend trip (72.3%). Subjects were most willing to attend training during the work day (88.9%).

Perceived Training Needs and Demographics

Table 6 displays the results of the demographic variables correlated with perceived training needs. Since the primary purpose of this analysis procedure was to discover relationships and not to predict them, a two-tailed test was used with the probability level set at .05. The demographic variables correlated with each of the training needs included experience, tenure, educations, time lapsed since last training session, and age. Training backgrounds and job types were eliminated due to problems with coding.

The results that were significant indicated that the more education secretaries had, the less they desired training in grammar ($r=-.448$, $p<.01$), in filing procedures/record keeping ($r=-.378$, $p<.05$), business correspondence ($r=-.351$, $p<.05$), interpersonal communication ($r=-.402$, $p<.05$), in-house communication ($r=-.545$, $p<.01$), receiving and screening visitors ($r=-.454$, $p<.01$), copying equipment ($r=-.340$, $p<.05$), and telephone communication ($r=-.609$, $p<.01$).

Experience was negatively correlated with perceived training needed on the dictaphone ($r=-.528$, $p<.01$). Length of tenure was negatively correlated

Table 1

Frequency Chart:

Demographic Variables

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Experience		
less than 6 months	0	.0
6 months to 2 years	4	11.1
2 years to 5 years	11	30.6
6 years to 10 years	7	19.4
11 or more years	14	38.9
Totals	36	100.%
Tenure		
less than 6 months	2	5.6
6 months to 2 years	10	27.7
2 years to 5 years	15	41.7
6 years to 10 years	4	11.1
11 or more years	5	13.9
Totals	36	100.%
Job Training		
Business/vocational school	7	19.4
Formal in-house training	3	8.3
On the job training	24	66.7
Other	1	2.8
Did not respond	1	2.8
Totals	36	100.%
Education		
less than high school graduate	0	.0
high school graduate	14	38.9
1 year of college	8	22.2
2 years of college	2	5.6
3-4 years of college	5	13.9
college graduate	7	19.4
Totals	36	100.%

Table 1 - Continued

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Time since last training		
less than 6 months	7	19.4
6 months to 2 years	7	19.4
more than 2 years	18	50.0
never	4	11.2
Totals	36	100.%
Age		
18-24	7	19.4
25-31	11	30.6
32-38	5	13.9
39-44	7	19.4
45-50	2	5.6
51 or more	4	11.1
Totals	36	100.%
Job Description		
Typing/filing/record keeping	20	55.6
Assistant to supervisor	13	36.0
Supervisor	2	5.6
Research/Investigation	1	2.8
Totals	36	100.%

Table 2

Frequency Chart:

Perceived Training Needs

Need - Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Typing		
no benefit	18	50.0
slight benefit	8	22.2
moderate benefit	5	13.9
high benefit	5	13.9
Totals	36	100.%
Grammar		
no benefit	6	16.7
slight benefit	13	36.1
moderate benefit	4	11.1
high benefit	13	36.1
Totals	36	100.%
Shorthand/Dictation		
no benefit	15	41.7
slight benefit	5	13.9
moderate benefit	8	22.2
high benefit	8	22.2
Totals	36	100.%
Filing Procedures/ Record Keeping		
no benefit	10	27.8
slight benefit	11	30.6
moderate benefit	12	33.3
high benefit	3	8.3
Totals	36	100.%
Business Correspondence		
no benefit	7	19.4
slight benefit	10	27.8
moderate benefit	9	25.0
high benefit	10	27.8
Totals	36	100.%

Table 2 - Continued

Need - Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Interpersonal Communication		
no benefit	7	19.4
slight benefit	7	19.4
moderate benefit	9	25.0
high benefit	13	36.2
Totals	36	100.%
In-house Communication		
no benefit	9	25.0
slight benefit	13	36.1
moderate benefit	3	13.9
high benefit	9	25.0
Totals	36	100.%
Telephone Communication		
no benefit	11	30.6
slight benefit	13	36.1
moderate benefit	8	22.2
high benefit	4	11.1
Totals	36	100.%
Receiving and Screening Visitors		
no benefit	9	25.0
slight benefit	16	44.5
moderate benefit	8	22.2
high benefit	3	8.3
Totals	36	100.%
Word Processor		
no benefit	5	13.9
slight benefit	1	2.8
moderate benefit	7	19.4
high benefit	23	63.9
Totals	36	100.%
Copying Equipment		
no benefit	17	47.2
slight benefit	8	22.2
moderate benefit	8	22.2
high benefit	3	8.3
Totals	36	100.%

Table 2 - Continued

Need - Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Dictaphone		
no benefit	20	55.6
slight benefit	5	13.9
moderate benefit	5	13.9
high benefit	6	16.7
Totals	36	100.%
Telephone		
no benefit	21	58.3
slight benefit	8	22.2
moderate benefit	5	13.9
high benefit	2	5.6
Totals	36	100.%
Other		
Responded	3	8.4
Did not respond	33	91.7
Totals	36	100.%

Table 3

Frequency Chart:

Subjects' First Ranked Needs

Need	Frequency	Percentage
Typing	3	8.3
Grammar	5	13.9
Shorthand/Dictation	3	8.3
Filing Procedures/Record Keeping	0	.0
Business Correspondence	3	8.3
Interpersonal Communication	6	16.7
In-house Communication	0	.0
Telephone Communication	0	.0
Receiving and Screening Visitors	2	5.6
Word Processor	9	25.0
Copying Equipment	0	.0
Dictaphone	1	2.8
Telephone	0	.0
Other	4	11.1
Totals	36	100.%

Table 4

Frequency Chart:

Overall Rankings of Top Three Needs

Need	Frequency	Percentage
Typing	5	5.0
Grammar	13	13.0
Shorthand/Dictation	10	10.0
Filing Procedures/Record Keeping	5	5.0
Business Correspondence	12	12.0
Interpersonal Communication	13	13.0
In-house Communication	3	3.0
Telephone Communication	0	.0
Receiving and Screening Visitors	4	4.0
Word Processor	21	21.0
Copying Equipment	3	3.0
Dictaphone	3	3.0
Telephone	2	2.0
Other	6	6.0
Totals	100	100.%

Table 5

Frequency Chart:

Times Willing to Attend Training Sessions

Time - Alternative	Frequency	Percentage
After Work		
yes	8	22.2
no	23	63.9
undecided	5	13.9
Totals	36	100.%
On Saturdays		
yes	9	25.0
no	25	69.4
undecided	2	5.6
Totals	36	100.%
Weekend Trip		
yes	7	19.4
no	26	72.3
undecided	3	8.3
Totals	36	100.%
During Work Day		
yes	32	88.9
no	1	2.8
undecided	3	8.3
Totals	36	100.%

Table 6

Correlation Matrix:

Demographic Variables by Training Needs*

Training Needs Variables	Demographic Variables: Experience	Tenure	Education	Time since last train.	Age
Typing	-.323	-.307	-.282	-.286	-.245
Grammar	.031	-.114	-.448(b)	-.203	-.073
Shorthand/ Dictation	-.255	-.128	.150	.056	-.327
Filing/ Records	.059	-.054	-.378(a)	-.260	.008
Business Corres.	.001	-.166	-.351(a)	-.375(a)	-.077
Interper. Com.	.160	.023	-.402(a)	-.206	.009
In-house Com.	.034	-.151	-.545(b)	-.195	-.092
Telephone Com.	-.008	-.158	-.609(b)	-.234	.023
Receiving/ Screening	.107	.000	-.454(b)	-.276	-.027
Word Processor	-.133	-.195	-.274	-.066	-.039
Copying Equipment	-.167	-.331(a)	-.340(a)	-.072	-.038
Dictaphone	-.528(b)	-.309	-.128	-.242	-.259
Telephone	-.192	-.254	-.245	-.088	-.205

*n=36
(a) $p < .05, r = .330$
(b) $p < .01, r = .420$

with needed training for copying equipment ($r=-.331$, $p<.05$). Finally, the last significant relationship found was a negative correlation between the time elapsed since the last training session and business correspondence training desired ($r=-.375$, $p<.05$).

Discussion

It was not surprising that only a few secretaries believed that training in typing would be a significant benefit. A similar pattern was found for shorthand/dictation. The most probable reason for these findings is that these skills are likely to be considered an important factor in hiring someone as a secretary. If one cannot perform these tasks, they are probably not hired as a secretary.

Training on the word processor was viewed by most as a highly important training need. This finding is consistent with the highest number one ranked need, as well as the highest of the top three combined rankings. It seems that secretaries viewed the word processor as a development that would make their tasks easier. Secretaries may have felt that the word processor would allow them to spend less time typing and allow them more freedom to accomplish other chores. On the other hand, secretaries may have perceived this as the opportunity to advance in their careers. They may have hoped to become more important to their present organization, or to increase their employability with other potential employers. Finally, observing that none of the secretaries surveyed in this study had access to a word processor, they may have viewed it as important simply due to their curiosity.

Interpersonal communication, grammar, and business correspondence followed the word processor in rankings of the top three training needs. Interpersonal communication and grammar were both listed by many as their number one training need. Perhaps these skills are recognized by secretaries as an

important part of their jobs but ones in which they have never received formal training. This would seem to be especially true in situations where the secretary was hired for her typing skills but expected to perform the role of receptionist, purchasing agent, or office manager.

Finally, it was apparent that secretaries did not want to interrupt their personal time to attend training programs. Family obligations are probably the biggest reason for this response, although the subjects living in the college community may have meant they had commitments to school. Since the subjects were all from a small town, it would be of interest to see if urbanites would respond in the same pattern. Perhaps subjects from urban areas would prove to have fewer traditional family ties and tend to be more career oriented.

Using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, several relationships between demographic variables and perceived training needs took on a clearer meaning. Of the correlations that reached a level of significance, all of them were negatively correlated.

Overall, education was significantly correlated with more items than any other. The more education people had, the less they felt they needed training in grammar, filing procedures/record keeping, business correspondence, interpersonal communication, in-house communication, telephone communication, receiving and screening visitors, and working copying equipment. Several reasons may explain these occurrences. Secretaries with higher levels of education may hold higher level positions which do not require many of these more menial tasks such as filing and shorthand. Even though a more educated secretary might hold a higher level position, she might perceive many of the skills as more basic to many of the other abilities she has gained through her education.

As for the more creative communicative type skills such as business correspondence, interpersonal communication, and even to some degree in-house and telephone communication, the higher educated person probably has a greater verbal propensity than those with lesser degrees of education. This is not to imply that education necessarily creates superior communicative abilities, but that the person who excels, or at least has the potential to excel academically, will quite probably have greater verbal competence than will those who are unable to gain education.

Length of experience was found to be negatively correlated with perceived training needed on the dictaphone machine. A similar relationship was found between tenure and copying equipment. These skills are probably considered basic to secretarial work, and therefore, the more experienced secretary either has learned to use the equipment thoroughly or no longer needs to utilize them in order to accomplish her tasks. A possible explanation for copying equipment being associated with tenure but not experience might be that a person who has worked with an organization for a number of years is more familiar with that company's equipment than a newer employee regardless of experience.

Limitations of Present Study and Conclusions

Obviously, any conclusions resulting from this study should be approached with caution. Although this study makes some headway toward understanding secretarial training needs, several limitations are apparent.

A larger sample of secretaries needed to be interviewed, and any replication of the study should consider increasing the number of subjects. Also, the population of subjects was somewhat restricted in that many of them came from an academic community. Several extraneous variables could have effected the overall findings, such as the type of tasks, educational backgrounds, and even the age group that is drawn to this type of environment.

Another limitation was the survey instrument itself. It is difficult to tell whether it really discriminated on such items as job type or specific training background. Also the item on "time since last training session" probably did not accomplish what it was intended to. It was hoped that this item would indicate innovative organizations or aggressive individuals seeking improvement. Perhaps a future survey could clearly distinguish between job levels, and also between various types of training backgrounds. Further, some method of better identifying innovative agencies and self-motivated people might be developed.

Although the present study presents findings with limited generalizability, these results are a starting point for future inquiry. It appears that businesses have a great deal to gain from investigating training needs. If organizations can more accurately assess their secretaries training needs, then money spent in training programs will yield a greater return upon investment. Secondly, if certain demographic variables are found to be correlated with certain desirable traits in secretaries, than organizations may implement a more systematic means of recruiting employees. Not only could this help cut cost by reducing turnover, but it could enable personnel managers to know what kind of skill deficiencies or over-qualifications to expect from an applicant. In this manner, the organization will be maximizing the goodness of fit between the secretary and her tasks.

Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

This research project seeks to determine perceived training needs of secretaries across a broad spectrum of organizations. The analysis will be based on the collective responses of individuals. It will not be necessary to identify any individuals who fill out this survey, therefore, please to not identify yourself by name anywhere on this survey.

The results of this project will be treated as confidential. If the results were to be published, or otherwise reported, the name of this organization and its type of service would be omitted.

In filling out this survey, please be frank and honest in order to ensure an accurate analysis of the situation.

THANK YOU

PART I

Please answer the following questions by placing a mark by the answer that most appropriately describes you.

1. Length of experience as a secretary.

_____ less than 6 months
_____ 6 months to two years
_____ 2 years to 5 years
_____ 6 years to 10 years
_____ 11 or more years

2. Length of experience with this organization.

_____ less than 6 months
_____ 6 months to 2 years
_____ 2 years to 5 years
_____ 6 years to 10 years
_____ 11 or more years

3. Specific job training.

_____ Business or trade school
_____ Formalized training in company
_____ On the job training
_____ Other_____

3. Educational background.

_____ Less than high school graduate
_____ High school graduate
_____ 1 year of college
_____ 2 years of college
_____ 3-4 years of college
_____ College graduate

5. How long has it been since you attended a training session directly related to your job.

_____ Less than 6 months
_____ 6 months to 2 years
_____ More than 2 years
_____ Never

6. Your age.

____ 18-24
____ 25-31
____ 32-38
____ 39-44
____ 45-50
____ 51+

7. Which best descibes your job duties?

____ Typing/filing/record keeping
____ Assistant to supervisor
____ Supervisor
____ Research/Investigation

PART II

If a training pragram was offered, how would each of the following areas benefit you? Please respond by placing a mark in the box that most accurately describes your feelings.

Job Related Areas or Skills	Would be of no benefit	Would be slightly beneficial	Would be moderately beneficial	Would be highly beneficial
Typing				
Grammar				
Shorthand/ Dictation				
Filing Procedures/ Record Keeping				
Business Correspondence (authoring letters)				
Interpersonal Communication Skills				
In-house Communication				
Telephone Communication				
Receiving and Screening Visitors				
Equipment Skills Use of:				
Word Processor				
Copying Equipment				
Dictaphone				
Telephone				
Other_____				

Including the topics listed in Part II, and any other job related areas you can think of, please rank-order the three you feel you would most benefit from.

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Would you consider attending training sessions:	YES	NO	UNDECIDED
After work during the week			
On Saturdays			
On a Weekend Trip			

References

Balsley, I. W. View from the top. Management World, 1979, 8, 1-18.

Hachey, M. A check list for in-house secretarial training. Personnel Journal, 1980, 59, 59-60.

Hilliads, V. J. Ten common mistakes of secretarial training. Personnel Journal, 1977, 56, 410-413.

Mehallis, M. V., & Fair, K. Occupational analysis: A basis for curriculum development and evaluation. Published by the Employment and Training Administration, Washington, D. C., 1979.

Occupational Outlook Handbook. Published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, 1978, (Bulletin #1955-5).

Rudnitsky, A. Los Angeles County Office Survey. Published by the Los Angeles City College, 1980, (Research #80-9).

Seixas, S. The case of the disappearing secretary. Money, 1980, 10, 84-87.